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ABSTRACT

The effect of social desirability on the variance accounted for by the scales of the Adjective Check List (ACL) was investigated in a sample of 366 female college students. Social desirability as a response style was defined as the tendency to present oneself in a favorable manner. The ACL was scored according to 23 of the 24 keys in the test manual. These data were submitted to principal components analysis, and the major resulting factors were rotated orthogonally for purposes of interpretation. A different sample of 20 females from the same college then rated the social desirability of each of the 300 ACL adjectives, on a scale of 1 to 5. Fifteen adjectives were selected as having high social desirability, 15 as neutral, and 18 as low. Statistical analysis indicated that three major components accounted for 75-78% of the total variance. The first of these three factors, social desirability, accounted for 35.6 and 35% of the variance in two principal components analyses. It was concluded that the primary factor measured by the Adjective Check List is social desirability. The data are appended. (Author/GDC)

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# SOCIAL DESIRABILITY AS A RESPONSE STYLE ON THE ADJECTIVE CHECK LIST

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An ever-present problem in the use of self-descriptive personality measures is the possibility that individuals are responding to something other than item content. In fact, response styles rather than content may actually be accounting for a substantial portion of the variance of these measures.

Social desirability, or the tendency to present oneself in a favorable manner, is considered to be one of the more prevalent response styles. For example, Jackson and Messick (1961) demonstrated that large portions of variance of MMPI scores were accounted for by social desirability, and Hanley (1956) reported substantial correlations between scaled social desirability values and probability of item endorsement on several MMPI scales.

While the MMPI has been the major research vehicle with respect to social desirability, different techniques and other instruments such as the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (Edwards, 1957) and Q sorts (Edwards, 1955) have also been employed.

A more recently developed personality measure, the Adjective Check List (Gough, 1965), has become a fairly common tool in personality assessment. The popularity of this instrument stems from its ease of administration and its non-threatening appearance to clients. The Adjective Check List (ACL) consists of three hundred (300) adjectives which are combined using both rational and empirical techniques to form twenty-four (24) scales. These scales are purported to measure various dimensions of personality, ranging from dominance to nurturance.

Although the ACL appears to provide a convenient means of personality assessment, its format may lend itself to the social desirability response style. The purpose of this study is to investigate the possibility that variance accounted for by the scales of the ACL can be attributed largely to social desirability.

METHOD.

This research follows closely the methodology outlined by Jackson and Messick (1962) in their examination of the operation of response styles on the MMPI. Data collection occured in two separate phases, with the data from phase one being employed in the major statistical analysis and the data collected during phase two being used to develop the social desirability scales.

The primary phase research participants (RP's) were female students attending a large southeastern university. A copy of the ACL was mailed to each of approximately seven hundred (700) RP's along with a letter asking them to complete the instrument according to written instructions. A stamped envelope was also provided with instructions for the return of the completed ACL to the researchers. Of the seven hundred potential respondants, three hundred seventy (370) returned ACL's that were readable and able to be scored. Each ACL was then reviewed for apparent errors resulting from a misunderstanding of instructions and for large numbers of improbable or inconsistent responses. This procedure further reduced the sample size to three hundred sixty-six (366).

Scoring of the ACL was accomplished by using the twenty-four (24) keys provided in the test manual. However, rather than converting

scale scores to normed tabled percentile values based on the number of adjectives marked, each scale score was multiplied by the reciprocal of the Number of Adjectives Marked (ACL scale number one). It was thought that this would serve as a control for what could be considered acquiesence, and would accomplish much the same purpose as conversion to percentiles.

The data were then submitted to a principal components analysis, intercorrelating the twenty three (23) scales (scale number one, Number of Adjectives Marked, was not included in the analysis) in the correlation matrix. The major resultant factors or components were then rotated orthogonally for purposes of interpretation.

In the second phase of data collection, twenty (20) RP's (also females from the same southeastern university campus) were asked to rate the three hundred (300) adjectives from the ACL on the basis of their social desirability. The rating for each adjective was made using a five-point scale with "1" representing very socially desirable and "5" representing very socially undesirable. The mean social desirability rating for each adjective was then calculated and these means were used to categorize the adjectives into ten intervals of .5 each. Then adjectives with infrequency of affirmative response in the original sample (less than fifteen percent responding) or near unanimity of affirmative response (greater than eighty-five percent responding) were discarded. Next, fifteen (15) adjectives with mean desirability ratings between 1.0 and 1.5 were arbitrarily selected to constitute a high social desirability scale. All of the adjectives with means between 2.0 and 3.0 were used to make up a neutral social desirability scale. This scale also consisted of fifteen adjectives.

The low social desirability scale consisted of eighteen (18) adjectives arbitrarily selected form those with mean social desirability ratings between 3.5 and 4.5.

The primary phase data were then scored using the three social desirability scale keys. The three obtained scale scores were divided by the number of adjectives marked and were then included along with the original twenty three (23) scales in another principal components analysis. The major factors were then rotated orthogonally once again.

RESULTS.

Results of the principal components analysis of the original data are presented on the left side of Table one. As can be seen, three major components account for approximately seventy-eight (78) percent of the total variance of the ACL scores. Beyond these three major components, the percentage of variance accounted for by the various components falls very sharply. Upon rotating these three major components, the factor matrix presented in Table two was obtained. The first factor accounting for thirty-five point six (35.6) percent of the total variance appears to be a dimension of social desirability.

The second principal components analysis was employed to add further information to this interpretation. As can be seen in Table one, this analysis resulted in very similar measures of percentage of variance accounted for (seventy-five (75) percent) by the first three components. Also, the primary factor again accounted for roughly thirty-five (35) percent of the total variance. The additional useful information provided by the second principal components analysis is contained in the loadings of the social desirability scales on the

primary component. Table three presents the loadings of the three social desirability scales on all three major components. Figures one, two, and three present two-dimensional plots of the positioning of the twenty-six (26) scales on the three components.

DISCUSSION.

As one can easily see, tne three social desirability scales quite clearly "line up" on the primary component. The correct ordering of these scales on the principal dimension lends support to the interpretation of that component as social desirability. The fact that half of the loadings from these three scales on the second and third factors is nearly zero strengthens this interpretation. Also, a plot comparing components two and three reveals that the ordering of the social desirability scales on either of these dimensions does not coincide with the intended purpose of the scales. In discussing the interpretation of the major component one should note that not only are the three social desirability scales ranked appropriately with respect to this component, but the loadings (correlations with this factor) differ substantially from one another, with the neutral scale correlating practically zero with the component. Both the high and low scales correlate highly with the component (.83 and -.68, respectively), with the relationships occuring in the hypothesized opposite directions. Thus, the reported analyses apparently confirms the hypothesis that the primary factor measured by the Adjective Check List is that of social desirability.

Table 1

Variance Accounted for by Principal Components of ACL

| Original Data | | | | SD Scales Added | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Factor | Eigen-value | % of Var | Cum % | Factor | Eigen-value | % of Var | Cum % |
| 1 | 8.20 | 35.6 | 35.6 | 1 | 9.21 | 35.4 | 35.4 |
| 2 | 6.25 | 27.2 | 62.8 | 2 | 6.75 | 25.9 | 61.4 |
| 3 | 3.36 | 14.6 | 77.5 | 3 | 3.51 | 13.5 | 74.8 |
| 4 | 0.95 | 4.1 | 81.6 | 4 | 1.07 | 4.1 | 78.9 |
| 5 | 0.69 | 3.0 | 84.6 | 5 | 0.84 | 3.2 | 82.2 |
| 6 | 0.55 | 2.4 | 87.0 | 6 | 0.59 | 2.3 | 84.4 |
| 7 | 0.43 | 1.9 | 88.8 | 7 | 0.58 | 2.2 | 86.6 |
| 8 | 0.38 | 1.7 | 90.5 | 8 | 0.45 | 1.7 | 88.4 |
| 9 | 0.32 | 1.4 | 91.9 | 9 | 0.40 | 1.6 | 90.0 |
| 10 | 0.31 | 1.3 | 93.2 | 10 | 0.35 | 1.3 | 91.3 |
| 11 | 0.22 | 0.9 | 94.2 | 11 | 0.31 | 1.2 | 92.5 |
| 12 | 0.21 | 0.9 | 95.1 | 12 | 0.27 | 1.0 | 93.5 |
| 13 | 0.18 | 0.8 | 95.9 | 13 | 0.25 | 1.0 | 94.5 |
| 14 | 0.17 | 0.8 | 96.6 | 14 | 0.21 | 0.8 | 95.3 |
| 15 | 0.15 | 0.6 | 97.2 | 15 | 0.18 | 0.7 | 96.0 |
| 16 | 0.13 | 0.6 | 97.8 | 16 | 0.17 | 0.7 | 96.6 |
| 17 | 0.11 | 0.5 | 98.3 | 17 | 0.16 | 0.6 | 97.2 |
| 18 | 0.10 | 0.4 | 98.7 | 18 | 0.13 | 0.5 | 97.7 |
| 19 | 0.07 | 0.3 | 99.0 | 19 | 0.12 | 0.5 | 98.2 |
| 20 | 0.07 | 0.3 | 99.3 | 20 | 0.11 | 0.4 | 98.6 |
| 21 | 0.06 | 0.2 | 99.6 | 21 | 0.08 | 0.3 | 98.9 |
| 22 | 0.05 | 0.2 | 99.8 | 22 | 0.07 | 0.3 | 99.2 |
| 23 | 0.04 | 0.2 | 100.0 | 23 | 0.06 | 0.2 | 99.4 |
| | | | | 24 | 0.06 | 0.2 | 99.6 |
| | | | | 25 | 0.05 | 0.2 | 99.8 |
| | | | | 26 | 0.04 | 0.2 | 100.0 |

Table 2

Factor Matrix of ACL

| Scales | Factor 1 | Factor 2 | Factor 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Defensiveness | 0.884 | 0.176 | 0.189 |
| # of Fav. Adj. | 0.914 | 0.263 | -0.025 |
| # of Unfav. Adj. | -0.860 | -0.157 | -0.088 |
| Self-Confidence | 0.070 | 0.887 | -0.089 |
| Self-Control | 0.658 | -0.214 | 0.621 |
| Lability | 0.161 | 0.107 | -0.736 |
| Personal Adjust. | 0.845 | 0.076 | 0.178 |
| Achievement | 0.296 | 0.774 | [illegible].356 |
| Dominance | 0.191 | 0.937 | 0.021 |
| Endurance | 0.470 | 0.424 | 0.676 |
| Order | 0.328 | 0.189 | 0.825 |
| Intraception | 0.787 | -0.049 | 0.160 |
| Nurturance | 0.896 | -0.213 | -0.149 |
| Affiliation | 0.849 | 0.110 | -0.249 |
| Heterosexuality | 0.485 | 0.236 | -0.605 |
| Exhibition | -0.140 | 0.671 | -0.504 |
| Autonomy | -0.503 | 0.724 | -0.240 |
| Aggression | -0.732 | 0.537 | -0.176 |
| Change | 0.064 | 0.367 | -0.709 |
| Succorance | -0.326 | -0.647 | -0.094 |
| Abasement | 0.081 | -0.884 | 0.176 |
| Deference | 0.447 | -0.767 | 0.316 |
| Readiness for Coun. | -0.620 | 0.383 | 0.296 |

Table 3

Factor Matrix of ACL including SD Scales

| Scales | Factor 1 | Factor 2 | Factor 3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Defensiveness | 0.891 | 0.160 | 0.180 |
| # of Fav. Adj. | 0.918 | 0.248 | -0.028 |
| # of Unfav. Adj. | -0.856 | -0.139 | -0.105 |
| Self-Confidence | 0.079 | 0.889 | -0.092 |
| Self-Control | 0.657 | -0.207 | 0.620 |
| Lability | 0.148 | 0.095 | -0.712 |
| Personal Adjust. | 0.841 | 0.065 | 0.178 |
| Achievement | 0.292 | 0.763 | 0.362 |
| Dominance | 0.202 | 0.931 | 0.014 |
| Endurance | 0.467 | 0.419 | 0.674 |
| Order | 0.318 | 0.187 | 0.827 |
| Intraception | 0.785 | -0.062 | 0.170 |
| Nurturance | 0.891 | -0.232 | -0.150 |
| Affiliation | 0.850 | 0.095 | -0.251 |
| Heterosexuality | 0.482 | 0.220 | -0.601 |
| Exhibition | -0.124 | 0.677 | -0.519 |
| Autonomy | -0.485 | 0.729 | -0.241 |
| Aggression | -0.726 | 0.543 | -0.184 |
| Change | 0.059 | 0.355 | -0.694 |
| Succorance | -0.351 | -0.645 | -0.096 |
| Abasement | 0.053 | -0.887 | 0.182 |
| Deference | 0.432 | -0.773 | 0.318 |
| Readiness for Coun. | -0.614 | 0.386 | 0.305 |
| SD - High | 0.831 | -0.039 | -0.084 |
| SD - Neutral | -0.040 | -0.469 | 0.456 |
| SD - Low | -0.677 | -0.389 | -0.099 |

Figure 1

Positioning of Scales on Components 1 & 2

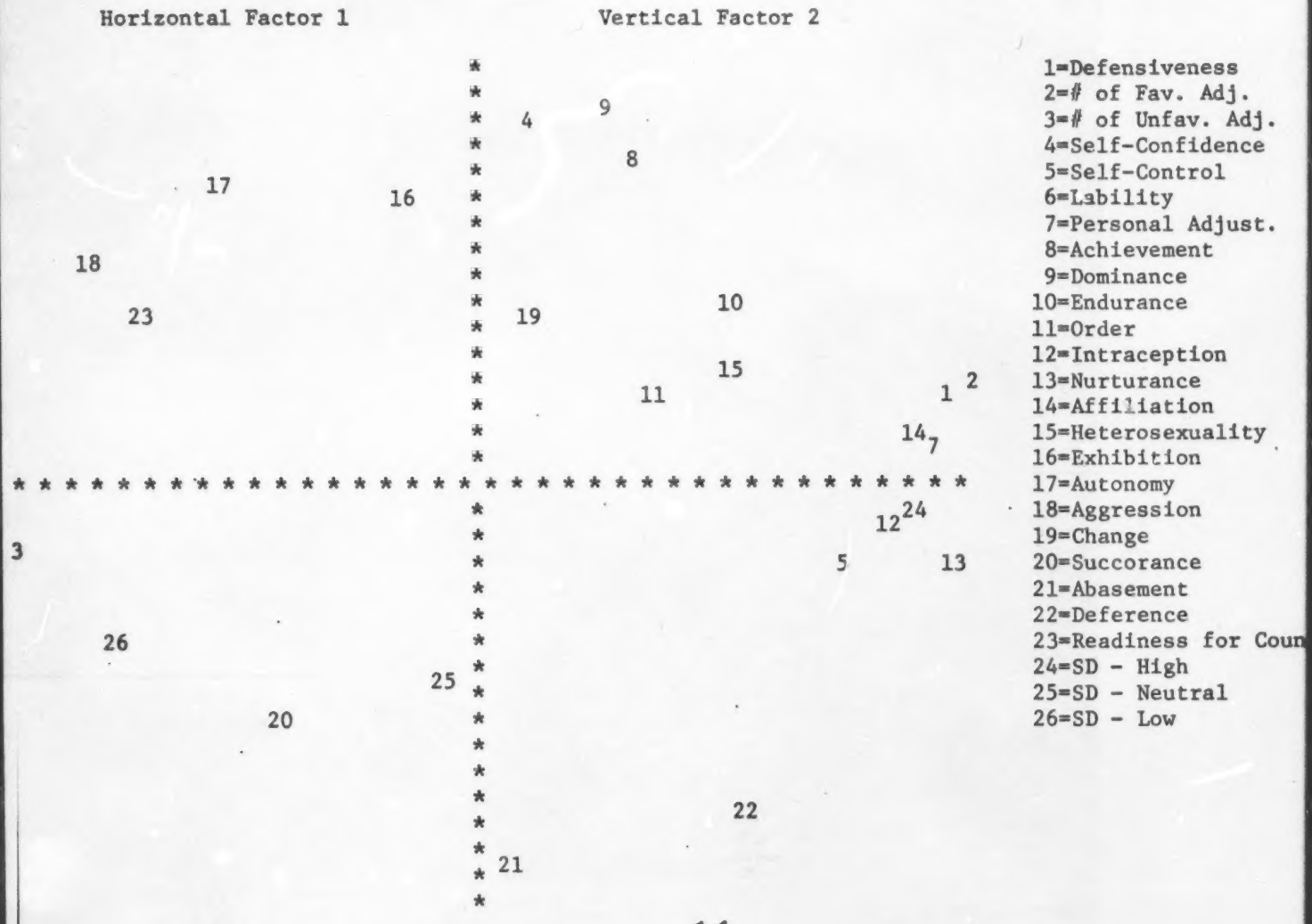


Figure 2

Positioning of Scales on Components 1 & 3

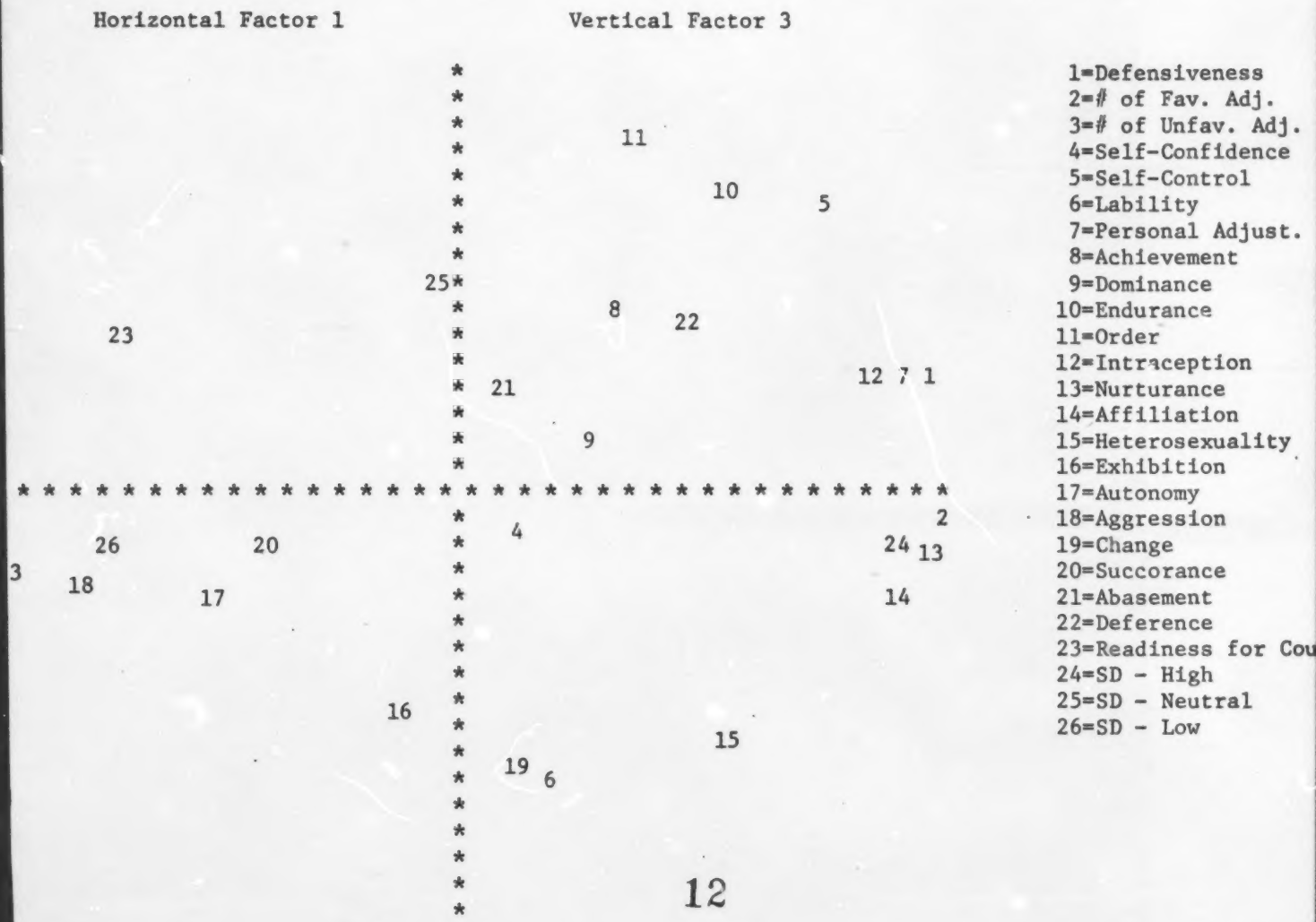
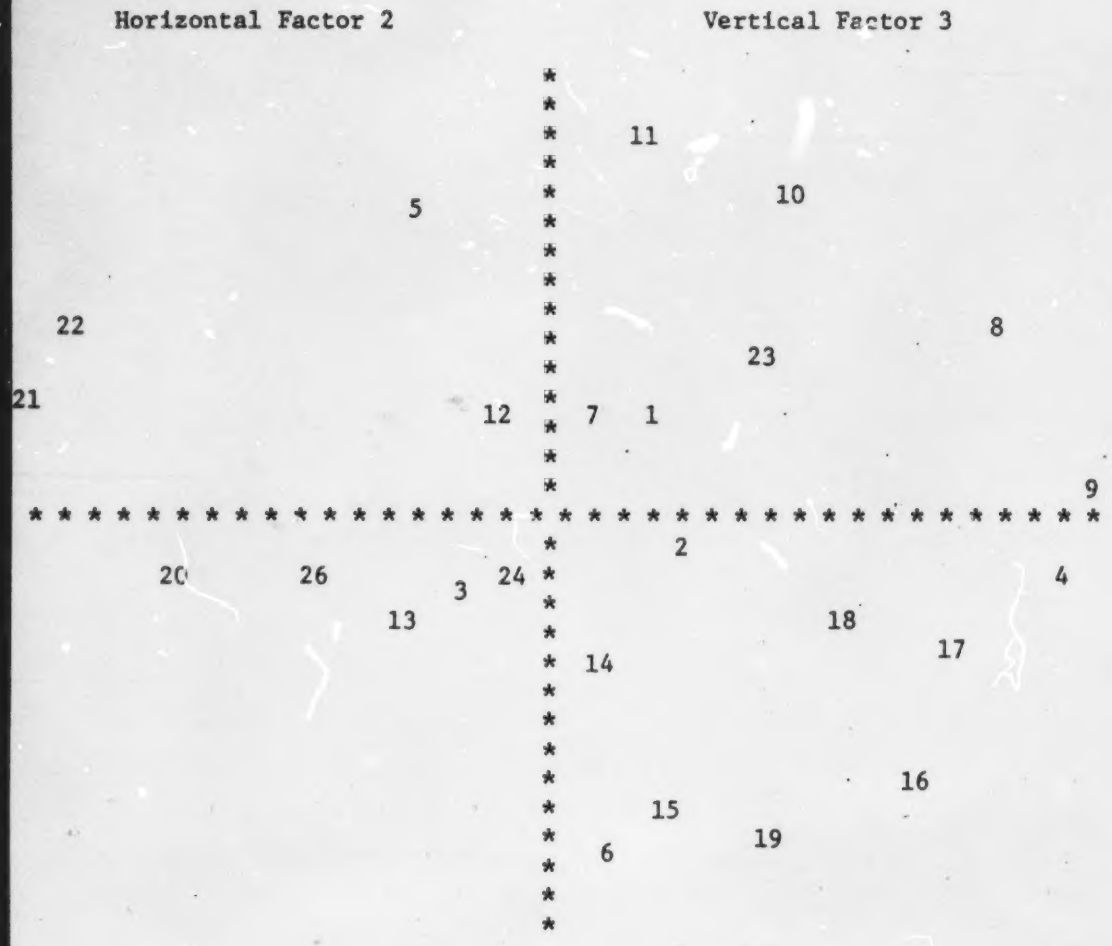


Figure 3

Positioning of Scales on Components 2 & 3




1=Defensiveness
2=# of Fav. Adj.
3=# of Unfav. Adj.
4=Self-Confidence
5=Self-Control
6=Lability
7=Personal Adjust.
8=Achievement
9=Dominance
10=Endurance
11=Order
12=Intraception
13=Nurturance
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16=Exhibition
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18=Aggression
19=Change
20=Succorance
21=Abasement
22=Deference
23=Readiness for Cou
24=SD - High
25=SD - Neutral
26=SD - Low

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